

## Food for the Ancestors – Day of the Dead

We can learn a great deal about a people by observing their time honored traditions. Each culture throughout the world, including our own, has its own unique customs and traditions. Many of these customs and traditions date back thousands of years and have been passed down through the generations. And each generation adds something new to these practices while still remaining faithful to the traditions of the ancestors. Customs and traditions include, but are not limited to, the **foods, religious practices, festivals and holidays**, and the **artistic achievements** of a people.

The story of the Spanish exploration and settlement of Mexico is one of destruction and conquest. And the nature of these tumultuous and uneven beginnings brought forth issues that are still unresolved in contemporary Mexico. Yet, it is important for students studying Mexican history to realize that the numerous Native American cultures of Mexico were not altogether wiped out by the Spanish conquerors. In fact, many Native American traditions persevered and remain to this day an important part of the rich Mexican culture.

A great way to better understand the blend of Spanish and native traditions that make up the Mexican culture we know today, is to examine Mexico's holidays and observances. The **Days of the Dead** is one of their favorite holidays. It is an annual celebration that honors the accomplishments of previous generations. And it is a festival by which the Mexican people remember their dead relatives and at the same time celebrate life. Moreover, it is an event that links the past with the present and gives us all a better understanding of ourselves and those who came before us.

### Before Viewing the Video – answer the following questions

- 1) Define the term “culture” as best as you can.
- 2) What are the elements of culture?
- 3) Why is it important to study the cultures of other people?

### During the Video

- 4) Look for and write down 5 examples of your ideas about culture.
- 5) Where do Mexican traditions come from?
- 6) Which customs are Native American and which are European?
- 7) Are there any similarities between Mexican traditions and American traditions?
- 8) What is a common flower that is used for the Day of the Dead?
- 9) What does the color of the flower represent?
- 10) Explain the use of art for the Day of the Dead celebration. (Ex. Sugar skulls, figurines)
- 11) What is the altar, or “ofrenda” for?
- 12) What is a copal?
- 13) What is pan de muerto?

### After Viewing the Video

- 14) How does Days of the Dead reflect Mexican views on aging (respect for the elders) and Mexican views of death?
- 15) How do we honor our ancestors in the United States?
- 16) Compare and contrast the traditions of Halloween and Days of the dead. Write 3 similarities and 3 differences?